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## Economic integration of immigrants - towards a new conceptualisation of an old term

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# CMR Working Papers

120/178

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## **ECONOMIC INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANTS – TOWARDS A NEW CONCEPTUALISATION OF AN OLD TERM**

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## **Abstract**

The main aim of this paper is to critically assess prevalent conceptualisations of the notion of *economic integration* to set out a research framework capable of structuring empirical research on economic integration, with a particular focus on the New Immigrant Destinations. To overcome the difficulties identified in the literature, we propose a new broad conceptual model of integration. We postulate that an analysis of economic integration outcomes (effects) should consider aspirations and capabilities of a given individual and include other than economic dimensions of immigrants' participation in receiving societies. Importantly, we treat aspirations and capabilities as useful concepts not only in understanding one's migratory behaviour (including immobility) but also in explaining and interpreting integration outcomes. In our approach, we go beyond traditional analysis of integration that focuses on settlement migrants and propose a scheme that allows for understanding of economic integration of various categories of immigrants.

**Key words:** economic integration, aspirations, capabilities, migration project, migration career, New Immigrant Destinations

## **Abstrakt**

W niniejszym opracowaniu poddajemy krytycznej ocenie dominujące konceptualizacje pojęcia *integracja ekonomiczna*, by określić ramy koncepcyjne niezbędne do realizacji badań empirycznych, także w przypadku tzw. Nowych Obszarów Docelowych Migracji (NID). Aby przezwyciężyć trudności wskazywane w literaturze, proponujemy nowy model koncepcyjny, w którym analiza wyników (efektów) integracji ekonomicznej uwzględnia aspiracje i zdolności/możliwości danej jednostki oraz pozaekonomiczne wymiary uczestnictwa imigrantów w społeczeństwach przyjmujących. Dowodzimy, że koncepcja aspiracji i możliwości może być przydatna nie tylko w zrozumieniu zachowań migracyjnych (w tym braku mobilności), ale także przy wyjaśnianiu i interpretacji wyników/efektów integracji. W proponowanej koncepcji odchodzimy od tradycyjnego podejścia w badaniach integracji, które koncentrują się na migrantach osiadłych i prezentujemy model, który pozwala ujmować i badać integrację ekonomiczną różnych kategorii imigrantów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** integracja ekonomiczna, aspiracje, zdolności/możliwości, projekt migracyjny, kariera migracyjna, Nowe Obszary Docelowe Migracji

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

*Integration* is the term most frequently used by European scholars<sup>2</sup> to describe the process of adaptation of immigrants in receiving states and communities. The basis of the concept is the conviction that society is a social system, a whole consisting of interconnected components and having distinct borders to its environment (Esser, 2001; Heckmann, 2006). Integration is perceived both as a state and as a process and hence both a static and a dynamic perspective may be adopted to study it (Böhning & Zegers de Beijl, 1995). By the latter approach, it has long been, and partially still is, perceived as a two-sided process, when both immigrants and the receiving society adapt to each other (Klarenbeek, 2019a; Penninx, 2019; Phillimore et al., 2018; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019). With the contestation of the multicultural approach, the emphasis shifted clearly to migrants' adaptation but the academic discourse still assumes mutual changes on both the receiving and the immigrating side. While integration is described by European scholars as a two-sided or even a three-way (Garcés-Masareñas & Penninx, 2016b) process that includes immigrants, host community, and countries of origin, it is important to keep in mind the context of its uneven power relations (majority vs. minority dynamics),<sup>3</sup> and different social and cultural capital involved in the relations between immigrants and the host society.

Despite being so popular, the concept of integration suffers from several shortcomings. Most importantly, although it is generally acknowledged that integration is an all-encompassing multidimensional concept, there is no consensus on the exact definition of the term. This is identifiable when considering economic integration of immigrants defined as unrestricted access of immigrants to the labour market and employment (Penninx, 2005), an ability to obtain an identical or similar position in the labour market as representatives of the receiving society (Barrett & Duffy, 2007) or just a catching-up process (Chiswick, 1978). The lack of a clear, generally accepted, conceptual framework for integration research causes that researchers choose different frameworks which best suit the needs of their research projects. Although we name several limitations of the concept, we decided to use this term mostly due to the absence of a more viable alternative. Terms like 'adaptation', 'inclusion', 'incorporation', 'adjustment', 'absorption', 'participation', 'embeddedness', 'emplacement', 'anchoring' or 'social cohesion' are no less ambiguous and, what is more, seem less suitable to study economic functioning of migrants and at the same time to explore the interaction of structure and agency. The use of these concepts depends to a large extent not only on theoretical traditions, research contexts, and academic disciplines but also on the desire to draw attention to a specific aspect of the process of integration – migrants' agency (in the case of 'participation' or 'adjustment' that emphasise the responsibilities and efforts of migrants) or institutional structures (in the case of 'inclusion',

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<sup>2</sup> In the public (non-academic) debate, *integration* is often confused with *assimilation*, which along with *incorporation* is a concept more frequently used by American scholars (Crul, 2016; Jiménez, 2017). Empirical studies on ethnic assimilation conducted in the American context virtually equated it with upward mobility (Gans, 2007), defining it in terms of reduction of social differences eventually leading to disappearance of ethnic distinctions. In contrast, the Australian literature treats integration as a central concept and often uses it interchangeably with the term 'settlement' (Squires, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Criticism of the concept of integration is by now well developed (Favell, 2019; Korteweg, 2017; Rytter, 2019; Schinkel, 2017; Wieviorka, 2014). Immigrant integration research was criticised for bad (or lacking) conceptual work, in particular in regard to the core sociological notion of 'society' (Schinkel, 2017, 2018). Many critics highlight the ongoing politicisation of the integration discourse arguing that immigrant integration monitoring constitutes a neocolonial form of knowledge that perpetuates power hierarchies by problematising difference (Hadj Abdou, 2019; Meissner, 2019; Meissner & Heil, 2020). Criticism also concerns the failure of capturing and examining diversity and fluidity (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018).

‘incorporation’, and ‘absorption’ that may lead to an overly rigid conceptualisation of the legal sphere, Castles et al., 2002, p. 117).

Against this background, the main aim of this paper is to critically assess prevalent conceptualisations of the notion of *economic integration* to set out a research framework capable of structuring empirical research on economic integration, with a particular focus on the New Immigrant Destinations, including Poland. While we focus on the economic aspects of integration, it is still necessary to provide a more complex discussion and to consider other aspects/dimensions of immigrants’ participation in receiving societies/systems/institutions. Thus, we set out a broader model of integration, which avoids narrowing of the concept alongside with some of the pitfalls, which integration’s critics have identified. We postulate that an analysis of economic integration outcomes (effects) should consider the very determinants of the process defined in terms of aspirations and capabilities of a given individual to control for his/her varying aims and plans. Additionally, we go beyond traditional analysis of integration that focuses on settlement migrants and propose a scheme that allows for understanding of economic integration of various categories of immigrants, including temporary/circular migrants and business/investment oriented migrants.

The paper is structured as follows. First part critically discusses available approaches to integration as one of the main concepts in migratory studies with a focus on socio-economic functioning of migrants. The second part presents our approach to integration and proposes a two-stage analytical model. It also offers a brief review of empirical research in the field. The last section concludes.

## **1. Integration of migrants – what does it mean to be integrated?**

As mentioned in the introduction, there is no clear and generally accepted conceptual framework for integration research. The problem of no single conceptualisation becomes visible in the operationalisation phase. Researchers choose different sets of spheres and variables to conceptualise and operationalise integration. Not only the literature offers several different conceptualisations and operationalisations of integration, but also many authors avoid providing a precise definition of the term. For instance, Ager and Strang (2008) develop a conceptual framework (which they call an operational definition of the concept) naming core components of integration. They do not, however, state explicitly what they understand under this term. The level of generality of some definitions – e.g. the one offered by Penninx (2005, 2019): “the process of becoming an accepted part of society” – raises additional questions (e.g. what does ‘accepted’ mean?). The notion has been interpreted in various ways also because researchers leave their definitions intentionally open to, as Penninx (2005, p. 141) argues, “capture more of its [integration process’s] diversity”.

Although it is so undefined, integration has become the prevalent term in the European context for describing the process of social change following the arrival of a migrant to the destination country and the most popular way of conceptualising the developing relationship between a receiving nation-state and incoming migrants (Favell, 2010). In fact, the concept has grown into a paradigm in migration research devoted to migrants’ presence in receiving countries (it seems, however, to lose its prominence, Pisarevskaya et al., 2019). Favell (2005) calls it a “seemingly inevitable framework” for studying immigration processes. Against this background, it comes as a bigger surprise that it has not yet been clearly defined. The literature offers a plethora of divisions of integration into different facets. Table 1 (which is by no means exhaustive) presents several available divisions.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Some authors distinguish also a spatial dimension of integration emphasising that most processes take place at the local level, e.g. Buhr (2018) develops the idea of spatial integration through an approach focused on urban praxis.

Although every such distinction is debatable, the conceptual differentiation of the integration process may be necessary given the differing nature of the processes ongoing within various domains. Despite differences in the names proposed by individual authors, certain similarities are visible. All the authors distinguish a dimension related to immigrant's access to institutions of the host society: labour market, educational system, health care, the housing system, welfare state institutions etc. It is called differently depending on the classification: *placement* by Esser (2001), *structural* by Heckmann and colleagues and by Spencer and Charsley (2016), *socio-economic* by Penninx and Garcés-Masareñas (2016), and *functional* by Engbersen (2003), but its scope is similar across different classifications. Another dimension that has been distinguished by several authors – occurring under different names e.g. *interaction* (Esser, 2001), *interactive* (Heckman and colleagues) or *social* (Spencer & Charsley, 2016) – is the one in which integration denotes full participation in terms of establishing social contacts between representatives of the minority group and the receiving society. The structural and social aspects of integration are accentuated in Bosswick and Heckmann's (2006) definition viewing integration as “the process of inclusion of immigrants in the *institutions* and *relationships* of the host society” (emphasis added by us).

Regardless of whether viewed as a process or as a state at a given point in time, integration can carry strong normative connotations (Favell, 2019; Meissner & Heil, 2020; Schinkel, 2017, 2018). The concept is based on a set of, often tacit, assumptions (Castles et al., 2002). One of the main presuppositions that lie at the root of integration research is that integration of migrants is a desirable direction. Some scholars claim it is a desirable end state (Geddes, 2001; Klarenbeek, 2019a) and a target for post-immigration policies (Favell, 2005). Others argue that there is no desired end state (Spencer & Charsley, 2016), which would imply that nothing like an ‘integrated society’ exists. Favell (2019) provocatively notes that full integration, considered not as a property of an individual but of a social system, may not be desirable as it would mean ending up with unified societies resembling North Korea.<sup>5</sup> Bijl et al. (2008), in turn, in a way contradict themselves stating that there is no desired end situation but at the same time describing integration as a “process leading towards the achievement of citizenship status” (p. 200), which suggests that acquisition of citizenship is a culmination point of the process. Does it mean it is the point at which migrants become fully integrated into the society? What about those migrants whose aim is – for various reasons – to stick to citizenship of their countries of origin? Notwithstanding these contradictions, integration is usually connoted with success (Bijl & Verweij, 2012; Martiniello & Rea, 2014) and upward mobility.

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<sup>5</sup> Other scholars, however, e.g. Klarenbeek (2019), attempt to define an ideal-type integrated society.



**Table 1. Domains of integration**

| Author/source   | Domains   | Scope   |
|---|---|---|
| Ager and Strang (2008)  | markers and means<br>social connection<br>facilitators<br>foundation              | employment, housing, education, health<br>social bridges (describe connections between groups), social bonds (describe connections that link members of a group), social links (refer to the connection between individuals and structures of the state, such as government services)<br>language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability<br>rights and citizenship  |
| Engbersen (2003)  | functional<br>moral<br>expressive   | the extent to which citizens can participate in the major institutions of the society (especially through work and education)<br>the extent to which citizens can participate fully and equally in society without any risk to their physical and personal integrity<br>the extent to which citizens can develop their individual and shared identities   |
| Entzinger and Biezeveld (2003)  | socio-economic<br>cultural<br>legal-political<br>attitudes of recipient societies | participation of migrants in the labour market, income level, the level of use of social security, welfare and other social policy instruments, the levels of education and training, the quality of housing and residence patterns<br>the degree of adherence to basic values and rules of the host society, knowledge of the main language(s) spoken in the recipient society, frequency of contacts with the host country and country of origin, choice of spouse, delinquency<br>numbers of migrants naturalised annually or who obtain a secure residence status, numbers of migrants with dual citizenship, participation in politics, participation in the civil society<br>reported cases of discrimination, perceptions of migrants by the host society, incidence and effects of diversity policies |
| Esser (2001)  | (ac)culturation<br>placement<br>interaction<br>identification                     | the acquisition of knowledge, cultural standards and competencies needed to interact successfully in a host society<br>the acquisition and occupation of relevant positions in a host society – in the educational system, in the economic system, in the professional domain, as a citizen<br>the formation of relationships and networks<br>the identification with a social system   |
| Heckmann and co-authors (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006; Heckmann, 2006; Heckmann & Schnapper, 2003) | structural<br>cultural<br>interactive<br>identificational                         | the acquisition of rights and the access to position and status in the core institutions of the host society (the economy and labour market, education and qualification systems, the housing system, welfare state institutions) and full political citizenship<br>the acquisition of the core competencies of the culture of the host society<br>the acceptance and inclusion of immigrants in the primary relationships and social networks<br>identifying with the goals of the core institutions of the host society and feeling of belonging to the host society  |

|                                      |   |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016) | legal/political<br>socio-economic<br>cultural/religious                           | the acquisition of residence and political rights and statuses<br>the access to social and economic positions in the host society<br>perceptions and practices of immigrants and the receiving society and their reciprocal reactions to difference and diversity   |
| Spencer and Charsley (2016)          | structural<br>social<br>cultural<br>civic and political participation<br>identity | participation in the labour and housing market, education and training<br>social interaction, relationships<br>changing values, attitudes, behaviour and lifestyle<br>participation in community life and the democratic process<br>development of a common identity and sense of belonging to the place, nation, communities |

*Source: Own elaboration.*

The integration paradigm presupposes ‘backwardness’ (Bijl et al., 2008) of migrants comparing to locals (this approach is much easier to defend in economic than social terms). The basic assumption that underlines such reasoning is that newcomers due to the lack of location-specific human capital suffer from certain disadvantages relative to local people (Barrett & Duffy, 2007). Namely, they are more likely to encounter “difficulties achieving a fulfilling social position” (Engbersen, 2003). Integration is thus identified with the process of overcoming these disadvantages. Often it is understood as moving towards the positions enjoyed by the autochthonous population (Bijl et al., 2008). Since, as it is assumed, newly arrived immigrants lag behind the majority native-born population, for example in terms of their educational and labour market attainments, integration is often perceived as a process of **making them more similar to the local population**.<sup>6</sup> By such an approach, comparison between the two groups – migrants and representatives of the receiving society – lies at the root of the concept (Böhning & Zegers de Beijl, 1995; Dustmann & Frattini, 2011). Following the words of Favell (2005, p. 5), integration is about “unifying a diverse population”. Dustmann and Frattini (2011) describe it in terms of a distance from the native or majority population. The question occurs, however, what criteria should be used to conceptualise that distance. Integration is often described as participation as full members of the community (Castles et al., 2002). For instance, Engbersen and colleagues (Engbersen, 2003; Snel et al., 2006) define functional integration as full participation in social institutions of the receiving country. But it does not answer the question what does it mean to be a ‘full member’. In reality, it may concern equality of rights, obligations, opportunities, entitlements, access, but also performance. Moreover, ‘full participation’ may be measured both relative to locals and relative to migrants’ legal entitlements. For instance, according to Böhning and Zegers de Beijl (1995), integration denotes enjoying by foreigners, in theory and in practice, opportunities that are comparable to those enjoyed by representatives of the native-born population with similar characteristics. As far as the labour market is concerned, migrants are usually perceived to be integrated when they occupy the same labour market position as comparable natives, or, in other words, experience the same levels of labour market success (Barrett & Duffy, 2007). The example of intra-EU migrants actually shows that it is not only about legal rights and entitlements but also actual opportunities and their usage. This presents a very interesting case as, applying the criterion of equal rights, migrants from the EU member states are integrated by definition, despite not necessarily being integrated in reality (Penninx, 2015) – which speaks for the use of another criterion.

According to an alternative approach that appears in the literature, being integrated means **performing well**, not necessarily performing equally as natives. Integration within this approach is viewed in terms

<sup>6</sup> All this in fact makes the concept hardly relevant to study adaptation of highly skilled migrants or immigrant entrepreneurs.

of ‘successful participation’ or ‘becoming independent participants in society’ (Bertossi et al., 2015). This way of assessing the position of immigrants within a host society involves operationalisation of their performance by means of such indicators as labour force status (possession of a job, its formal status), compliance of work with one’s qualifications or proportion of time spent in full-time employment (see e.g. Piché et al., 2002). Operationalisation of this kind is commonly encountered in empirical works. The main advantage of this approach is that one can easily include migrant-specific information, i.e. characteristic of the ethnic networks (Lancee, 2012).

The two approaches – relative, i.e. based on distance from the natives, and the one based on the assessment of migrants’ objective performance – may be applied to both a structural and social dimension of integration. However, the equality criterion seems to be utilised more frequently in relation to the structural rather than social dimension of immigrants’ participation in receiving societies (e.g. OECD & European Union, 2018). Defining integration in relative terms as the degree of equality with natives would be implausible, for instance, in the case of comparing immigrants to the native population on bridging social capital (Lancee, 2012). Nevertheless, the key question remains the same: which criterion should we use, that is whether we should measure the overall performance level or performance relative to the local population? In other words, what does it mean to integrate – becoming successful (but what defines a success?) or becoming like everybody else (i.e. like the majority)? The two alternatives do not need to be equivalent. What if locals participate in the labour market at very low levels (as it is the case of several Southern European economies) and immigrants’ economic activity levels are higher than natives from the start? Let us consider, for example, structural integration measured by participation in the labour market or civil and political integration measured by participation in the institutions of civil society. Imagine an immigrant – employed/actively engaged in local affairs of the host community – in a locality with high unemployment levels/low community involvement rates. Does this mean that integration understood as becoming equal to natives in this case would boil down to ‘lowering migrants’ performance’?<sup>7</sup> If integration is understood as a situation when immigrants are capable of using their rights – what if locals cannot use their rights either? We may add here the following question posed by Castles and colleagues (2002, p. 125): is integration expected of all newcomers (also, for example, wealthy businesspeople, see also Schinkel, 2018)? All these questions exemplify the need to set a proper reference point.<sup>8</sup> In other words, it is crucial to take into account the norm of the receiving (or maybe both receiving and sending) society when thinking about integration in equality terms. This brings us back to the postulates raised by critics of integration (Favell, 2019; Korteweg, 2017; Schinkel, 2018) that some representatives of the native-born population may be not ‘properly’ integrated either. This would imply that integration should be understood not as converging to the outcomes obtained by the natives but rather as pursuance of some envisioned target outcome (see also Klarenbeek, 2019b).

Integration is usually examined from the perspective of a nation-state. Favell (2005) states that integration policy is about what the state can do to “‘nationalise’ newcomers and re-constitute the nation-state under conditions of growing cultural diversity” (p. 5). The nation-state perspective entails a tacit assumption that the receiving population is ruled by a homogenous set of norms and values (Castles et al., 2002). At the same time, several scholars (Castles et al., 2002; Favell, 2005; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019) point to an ambiguity of the integration concept which boils down to the question: *what* the immigrant is integrating into – e.g. the society, a local community of a province

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<sup>7</sup> Those questions have been crucial also in the newly formulated assimilation theory by Alba and Nee (2003) and *segmented assimilation theory* (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Portes & Zhou, 1993), which explain different assimilation outcomes intergenerationally across different ethnic groups. The authors argue that some ethnic groups are socially mobile because of their strong social cohesion and resistance to Americanisation while other assimilate into the poor underclass.

<sup>8</sup> Kraler et al. (2015, pp. 54–55) offer an illustrative example showing the importance of choosing the reference group and benchmark in comparative research.

or a city? As regards the issue of embedding the integration process in the local context, some researchers (e.g. Geddes, 2001) underline the need for a multi-level approach which would enable overcoming the disadvantages of the “fixation with ‘national models’” (p. 2), while others focus on local relations that break down the distinctions between co-ethnics and majority residents trying to capture the mechanisms of migrant emplacement (Buhr, 2018; Schiller & Çağlar, 2013; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019). When the focus is on economic aspects of integration, the level of analysis does not, however, seem to play a role in assessing immigrant’s integration when the ‘successful participation’ criterion is applied. Hence, there is no need to specify the exact geographical scale.

Although the dominant approach assumes adoption of the individualistic perspective, some authors suggest that examination of integration processes demands a more collective approach (Favell, 2019; Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016; Martiniello & Rea, 2014; Penninx, 2005).<sup>9</sup> Here, however, an important question occurs – does integration on a group level automatically translate into integration on an individual level? Organisations established by immigrants may become an accepted part of the host country’s civil society, but this does not mean that they will succeed in engaging all immigrants in their activities, majority of them may choose to remain inactive.

Importantly, integration in one sphere does not need to entail integration in other sphere. In particular, this may concern structural and social domains of integration. An illustrative example might be a prosperous ethnic business, whose owners may be deemed integrated in economic terms because of being successful, but not necessarily socially integrated in terms of having intense (informal) social contacts with the receiving society. Likewise, members of such distinctive social groupings may be perceived as integrated given their high or relatively high (dependent on the approach) labour market attainments. They may also be socially integrated in terms of contacts with business contractors, but at the same time remain socially integrated only within their minority group and relatively unintegrated with the majority group.<sup>10</sup>

Typically the concept of integration applies mostly to long-term migrants.<sup>11</sup> Some scholars argued that integration is not pertinent to temporary migrants and only gains relevance when their stay becomes permanent (Böhning & Zegers de Beijl, 1995). A question arises, however, whether the issue of integration concerns such groups as circular migrants, who are trapped in the state of ‘permanent temporariness’ and often spend a considerable share of the year in the destination country. It seems justifiable to apply the integration framework to study such groups, especially since their migration project may potentially evolve into a permanent settlement in the future (see also Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018). Martiniello and Rea (2014) suggest that to get a comprehensive view on integration, one should analyse migrant practices not only in the country of destination but also in the country of origin.

One may also ask whether transnational activities of migrants undermine or, on the contrary, contribute to integration (Garcés-Mascareñas & Penninx, 2016a; see Snel et al., 2006). Kemppainen and colleagues (2020) proposed a multifocal model of integration that includes the transnational sphere as a possible focus of integration, along with the host society and co-ethnic community in the host society. Charsley et al. (2020) postulate that integration process starts with the first moment of engagement with the country of destination – on the day of arrival or even before, e.g. through

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<sup>9</sup> See also Schinkel (2018), who argued against individualisation of integration, claiming that such an approach lacks theoretical underpinnings (though his main argument relates to the fact that a person cannot be ‘disintegrated’, falsely assuming that an antonym to integration would be disintegration, while in fact an individual may be deemed unintegrated instead).

<sup>10</sup> As Bosswick and Heckmann (2006, p. 10) notice, ethnic niches usually foster integration at the early stages after migrant’s arrival, while they hamper social integration at a later stage.

<sup>11</sup> More recently, integration research encompasses also pathways of settlement of ‘new migrants’ who have been living in the destination country for less than two years (Phillimore et al., 2018; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019).

transnational contacts. The relationship between migrant's integration level and his/her involvement in transnational activities is not as straightforward as it may seem at first. For instance, in case of circulants, maintaining contact with relatives left behind in the country of origin through regular visits may be a marker of integration, since it proves that migrants have comprehended the receiving state's migration rules (an irregular migrant, in turn, would not be able to circulate freely). Moreover, as argued by Stark and Dorn (2013) remittances and assimilation (they use this term in a meaning similar to cultural integration, i.e. acquisition of "culture, norms, and productive attributes of the host country", p. 1) do not need to be at odds with each other. It should be noted, however, that a nation-state has the capacity to curtail the agency of individuals in performing transnational practices by managing the extent of their engagement, e.g. posing legal obstacles (Kyei et al., 2020).

Also, the question of applicability of the concept of integration to the temporary (not necessarily circular) migration pattern is not straightforward. While conventional definitions have placed temporary mobility as related to residence under one year (OECD, 2018), a range of scholarship on transnationalism (Faist et al., 2015; Portes et al., 1999; Vertovec, 2007) and return migration (Carling & Erdal, 2014; Ryan & Mulholland, 2015) point to increasingly complex realities. We acknowledge that for a growing share of individuals, mobility is tied to a specific project rather than outright settlement and can span several years, after which a person is likely to move elsewhere or return home. While their initial aim is not that of settlement, and they do not qualify as circular migrants, their process of adaptation within the host society is no less relevant. Our proposal for the study of integration is to include a broader meaning of temporary migration to reflect this reality of non-linear and non-permanent globalised mobility. Taken together, we aim to formulate a research framework that would enable us to go beyond the study of permanent migrants making the integration concept applicable to other migration patterns, *inter alia*, temporary or circular migrants, who divide their time between the sending and receiving country.

## **2. Towards a new conceptual model of economic integration**

This part presents the conceptual model we propose for the sake of empirical research on the economic integration of immigrants. Despite clear focus on the structural/economic domain of integration (as this is the main aim of this paper), we acknowledge the importance of other domains (see Table 1). In particular, we argue that the social domain is of high importance for the incorporation of immigrants (i.e. due to the clear links between migrant networks of all types and the inclusion of immigrants into institutions of the host country). We start with an outline of key concepts relevant to the development of this new model of immigrant economic integration.

The model aims to engage with the broader academic effort taken up by several migration scholars to integrate a range of macro and micro approaches for a more complete and accurate understanding of the migratory and integration processes. Importantly, we aim to propose a model suitable for analysis of the integration of immigrants presenting distinct migration motives/strategies and, additionally, relevant for application in countries placed in various phases of the migration cycle. In particular, we acknowledge the specific character of immigrants coming to the New Immigrant Destinations, who are often temporary or even circular and thus commonly do not correspond to 'traditional' approaches to integration (e.g. studies looking at the long-term changes in the situation of immigrants, including the catching-up process). We claim that the analysis of integration outcomes could be substantially enriched if we consider migration process as such (and its diversity) and a range of factors shaping migration decision making, including family obligations, a sending country's socio-cultural context, or personal mobility capital. So our approach towards integration and its outcomes incorporates the

importance of drivers of migration – both in terms of a relevant opportunity structure and the concept of migrant agency – and variety of mobility forms.

There are two key foundations of our model: the concept of aspirations and capabilities, and the idea to look at mobility in terms of migration projects/careers.

The idea to look at migration decisions through the prism of two analytical concepts – a desire (aspiration) to be mobile and an ability to migrate – has been first introduced by Carling (2002) to explain what he called ‘involuntary immobility’ in the case study of Cape Verde. Since then this approach has been a subject of both theoretical and empirical considerations. The main foundation for our model is provided by de Haas (2011), who outlines a case against a strictly neo-classical ‘macro’ analysis of mobility and argues that migratory decisions are not simply based on cost-benefit calculations made by rational agents but are usually motivated by multiple sets of clearly interconnected social, economic, political and cultural factors. This would imply that an emphasis is being placed on structural matters and that migration is conceptualised as a function of much broader sets of opportunities than solely income or wage differentials. Among a range of supporting arguments de Haas (2011, p. 9) points to the perspective introduced by the new economics of labour migration (NELM), which “conceptualizes migration as a collective household strategy (...) rather than a mere response of income-maximising individuals to expected wage differentials”. It is important to note, however, that NELM was proposed as an extension of the basic microeconomic model of migration decision-making and thus focuses particularly on the individual level factors but includes elements of ‘structural realities’ (e.g. market failures or missing markets, Stark & Bloom, 1985). Thus, it could be understood as an attempt to address the structure-agency nexus present in social sciences (and not that obvious in economics).

The connection between individual decision making and the opportunity structure and connection between migration and broader development process are further explained in de Haas’s (2011) discussion of the key two terms of *aspirations* and *capabilities*. *Aspirations* are described by him as a sum of personal goals and awareness of opportunities, both of which can be shaped through culture, education, and exposure to new information. This is an important concept since the way aspirations influence personal motivation and actions might be hard to capture through standard ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors. In the context of the discussion presented above an important contribution was proposed by van Meeteren (2014, p. 219) who describes aspirations as “a conceptual bridge between structure and agency” as they are “fed not only by needs and wants, but also by perceived possibilities and constraints”.

Further, de Haas defines *capability* as the freedom to pursue personal life choices and decisions. In that context, he describes mobility as the capability to decide whether to be mobile and where to live. Capabilities are further explained in the context of Berlin’s (1969) negative and positive liberties – with the former defined as the absence of obstacles, barriers or constraints towards one’s actions, or mobility, and the latter defined as the actual possibility of exercising agency. It simply means that people need to have access to certain resources (can be defined and understood in terms of Bourdieu’s capitals) to exert their agency, including internal or international mobility. Czaika and Vothknecht (2014) move one step further and conceptualise migration as a function of an individual’s capability for migration, which is defined as a combination of two capacities: the capacity to aspire and the capacity to realise, but the main idea remains similar. According to this approach, people are not rough income maximisers but in their mobility decisions, they consider a large number of factors, including the aspiration gap, i.e. the difference between an individual’s current and aspired level of well-being. Importantly, Czaika and Vothknecht (2014) argue that as the capacity to aspire includes not only the ability to aspire but also knowledge of how to achieve certain goals, it can change over time, be

inherited but can also be the product of one's social environment (e.g. university or family home). This feature of aspirations-capabilities framework has been further developed by Collins (2018) who reconceptualised migration as an ongoing process and, additionally, suggested to look at aspirations as a strongly emotional phenomenon that should go beyond such terms as plans, ideas, strategies and goals. Carling and Collins (2018) link the growing importance of such issues as aspirations or desires in migration studies to an increasing theoretical interest in emotions but also temporalities. They also argue that more and more common reference to drivers instead of causes or determinants is not a mere synonymisation but it rather signifies a new conceptual approach. According to this approach, the term 'driver' refers primarily to material forces that can influence mobility but rather indirectly as they impact on the individual agency (Van Hear et al., 2018). The temporal dimension of decision making is important and it has been strongly emphasised by Carling and Schewel (2018) who plea for an even more sophisticated two-step approach to analyse migration, which assumes that migration process could (and should) be disaggregated into the formation and realisation of migration aspirations.

According to the discussed approach, a migration decision is not only an outcome of aspirations but also a function of capabilities. In simple words, the capability to realise a certain migration project is a function of a set of endowments including all possible forms of capital: economic, social, human and political (Czaika & Vothknecht, 2014; de Haas, 2010a). Moreover, in most cases, a migration decision is conditional on a set of capacities. In other words, a person with a certain level of aspirations that can be fulfilled by means of migration can never translate these preferences into real migration without the sufficient capacities to realise. The narrow understanding of aspirations and capabilities, i.e. as factors related to mobility only, remains extremely useful in analysing and explaining various forms of migration and, particularly, immobility (Schewel, 2020). Note, however, that in our approach – and similarly to de Haas – we go beyond a large part of the migration literature that limits the notion of aspirations to the sphere of migration only ('aspirations to migrate') and which claims that migration can be valued in its own.<sup>12</sup> We do not deny such an option but argue that in many cases, mobility is rather instrumental and presents a means to an end (better, secure life for an individual or his/her family). We suggest in turn looking at aspirations and capabilities over the life course. Similarly, we perceive capabilities in a broader sense, not only as an ability to initiate and complete migration but as a capability to carry out generally defined life projects (e.g. a capability to expand the freedoms that people enjoyed as proposed by Sen (1999) and then clearly articulated by UNDP (2009).

The second conceptual inspiration presents the idea of a migration project or a migratory career. An example of how concepts of aspirations and capabilities might be applied together with a particular typological exercise is provided by van Meeteren (2014) in her discussion on irregular migrants in the Netherlands and Belgium. Dividing her respondents based on the type of a migratory project undertaken by them, van Meeteren classifies her subjects as 'investment', 'settlement', or 'legalisation' migrants. Each of these groups has a set of specific aspirations, which in turn have a decisive influence on their strategy, social circle, and the overall trajectory of interaction with the host society and economy. 'Investment migrants' aimed to make money towards a very specific project in their home country, such as the opening of their own business or paying for their wedding. They remitted a large share of earnings home, and effectively remained socially oriented towards their country of origin, with the ultimate goal of improving their position and livelihood in the home country. In contrast, 'settlement migrants', hoping to build a new life in the destination country, usually pursued a better work-life balance, allowing for time with family and for more social activity (and they were willing to spend money on decent accommodation in a good area). Those who pursue

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<sup>12</sup> For instance, Carling and Talleraas (2016) suggest looking separately at 'life aspirations' and 'migration aspirations', even if those two aspects of aspirations are usually strongly bound together (particularly if there is a common 'culture of migration').

legal status put significant effort in learning the language and making local contacts, including a marriage partner. They also remit little to none of their earnings back home, with the destination country serving as a primary framework of reference. Beyond illustrating differences in livelihood strategy among different groups, van Meeteren's study demonstrates that if migrants change their aspirations, their migration projects and modes of integration are expected to change as well. Additionally, it makes sense to assume that aspirations can change as a result of changes in perceptions of the opportunity structure or changes in the opportunity structure itself.

A similar perspective was introduced with the concept of *migratory careers*, described by Martiniello and Rea (2014), which can be helpful towards studying the evolution of a person's aspirations. The scholars describe a *migratory career* as "a simultaneous learning process of practice and of a change in social identity" which is shaped both by objective legal and socio-economic conditions and subjective "confrontation between initial expectations and real-life migration experiences" (p. 1083–1084). For Martiniello and Rea migration experience itself is marked by an evolving identity, created through elements of culture (both host and origin country) and individual learning. Two elements concerning the concepts of aspirations and capabilities are worth further notice. First, the idea of 'mobility capital' refers to a combination of skills and knowledge (commercial, organisational, political etc.) acquired over years of experience, which form a basis of one's migratory ability. Second, the authors point out the personal notions of success and failure, as something highly subjective and frequently defined collectively in relation to friends and family. As such, both success and failure, which are likely to drive aspirations, should be analysed in the context of both sending and receiving populations.

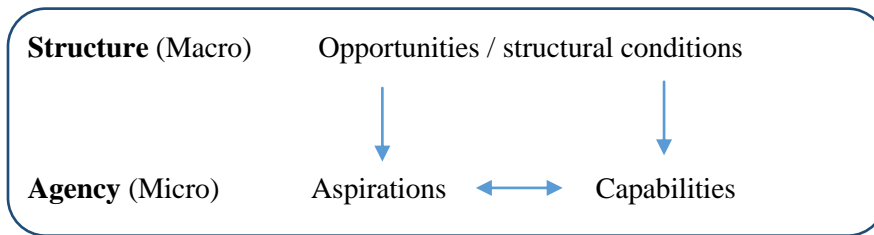
Based on the concepts presented above as well as on the discussion on integration included in the previous section we propose a two-stage analytical model. The first part of it focuses on an individual migratory project. As there is no unequivocal definition (and understanding) of a migration strategy in the literature, we do not aim at defining it and, in particular, discussing what is the difference between strategies and tactics in migrants' everyday life (Friberg, 2012; Janicka & Kaczmarczyk, 2016; Krings et al., 2013)<sup>13</sup>. Instead, we suggest to look at migration projects as statistically traceable patterns of migrants' behaviour (e.g. duration of stay, frequency of travels back home, presence of family members, settlement plans, remitting) and argue that they may have an impact on the process of integration and integration outcomes. Additionally, we assume that migration projects have a clear temporal dimension. The way such a project translates into an actual social and economic integration process can be then analysed through the lens of one's 'migratory career' – which helps to capture the *evolution* of a migrant's social identity and aspirations, together with the capitals they accumulate to make actual integration possible. Importantly, an opportunity structure should be carefully considered – not simply as broad demographic and economic circumstances, but also as a configuration of different factors such as legal mechanisms, policy and infrastructural support towards concrete migration decisions, available or established migration channels, as well as migrant social networks and community support. Figure 1 depicts the dynamics of such a migratory project – shaped through an opportunity structure (i.e. structural conditions), individual aspirations, and an individual's actual ability to act on them (capabilities).

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<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless we acknowledge the importance of this debate in the context of particular migration projects and integration outcomes.



**Figure 1. Schematic presentation of factors influencing an individual migratory project**



*Source: Own elaboration.*

The second part of the proposed model refers explicitly to the integration of immigrants. It relies on a few important assumptions.

First, in our model we refer explicitly to the conceptualisation of integration suggested by Boswick and Heckmann (2006), who define it as the process of inclusion of immigrants into institutions and relationships of the host society.

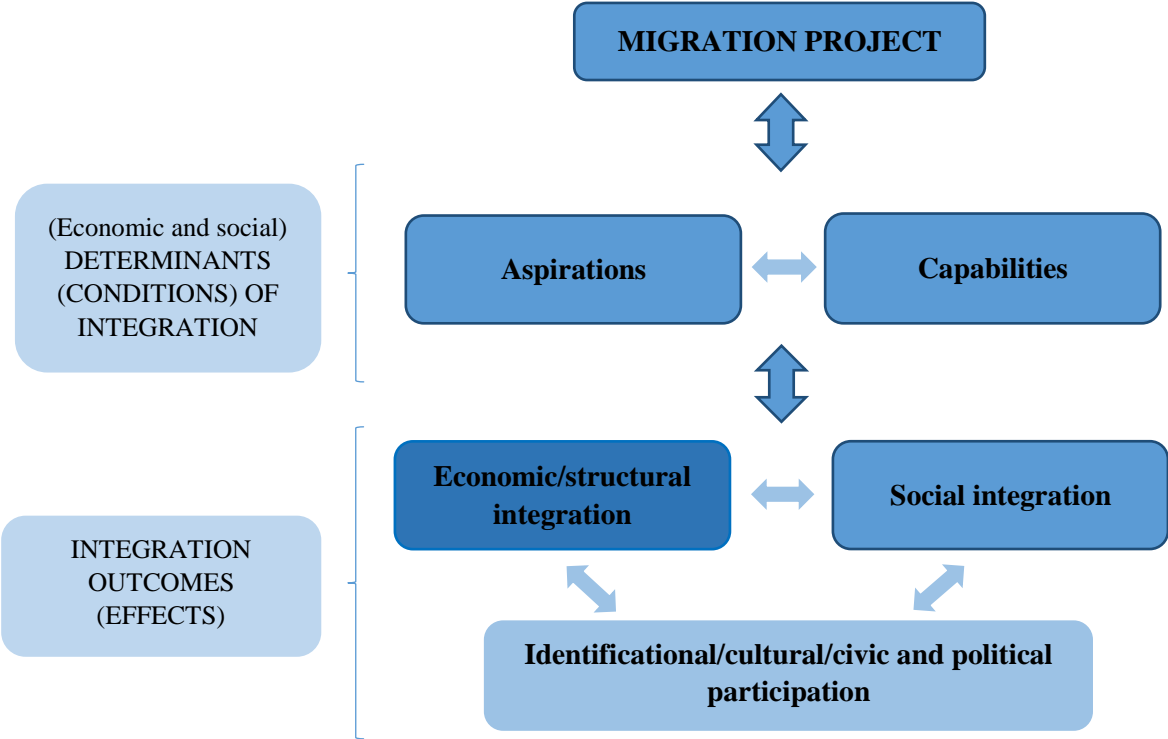
Second, being concentrated on economic integration, our approach puts the structural/functional/socio-economic (to use different categorisations present in literature) domain in the spotlight. At the same time, we believe that in the environment of frequent transnational mobility, the analysis of economic integration should aim to capture something beyond the core ‘functional’ indicators (e.g. employment and wages, education, property, health care), and should also take into account immigrant’s ties to both the receiving and the sending community as well as other domains of integration. From the literature, it follows that the domains of integration should not be deemed separate but rather strongly inter-connected (even if from the perspective of economic integration, other domains are seen rather as important mediators). Our model includes aspects of social integration with particular emphasis on social interactions and the nature of ties developed by migrants. In particular, this refers to the degree to which migrants are able to develop relationships at the local level and the degree to which these relationships include members of the host population, as opposed to transnational and diasporic community. With the very idea of a society as a ‘system’ with ‘distinct borders to its environment’ (Esser, 2001; Heckmann, 2006, as cited above) becoming questionable in light of transnational mobility (D. Massey, 1993), the role of personal networks in the process of integration deserves additional emphasis and attention. Thus our approach is to some extent similar to Ager and Strang (2008), who are considering the structural dimension as an outcome and treating the social dimension as an important factor influencing it.

Third, we assume that the conceptual model proposed needs to consider migration realities observed in the New Immigrant Destinations, especially in countries treated as latecomers in the European migration cycle (Okólski, 2012). In particular, this refers to an overwhelming presence of temporary or circular migrants, lack of second-generation migrants, poorly developed migrant economies and underdeveloped integration-related public policies. Hence, our analysis will refer to both settlement-oriented and temporary/circular migrants, including investment-oriented migrants. This approach aims at including all-important categories of immigrants in Poland (as well as in other New Immigrant Destinations) and capturing the diversity of both migration projects and integration outcomes.

Fourth, we are aware that both the aspirations/capabilities part of the conceptual model, as well as integration outcomes, are strongly conditional on structural factors. Available literature suggests that integration of both newcomers and established immigrants is substantially influenced by integration policies (Bijl et al., 2008; Ersanilli & Koopmans, 2011; Kogan, 2016; Marcu et al., 2018), active labour market policies (OECD & European Union, 2018), the structure of the welfare system (Borjas, 1999; Friberg & Midtbøen, 2019; Koopmans, 2010), general policies (Lewin-Epstein et al., 2006) or

even place of initial settlement (Rogne et al., 2020; see e.g. Wimark et al., 2019). For this reason, possible comparative studies based on the proposed conceptual model should account for differences in structural conditions (both in terms of migration projects and integration drivers/outcomes). Figure 2 presents the proposed conceptual model.

**Figure 2. Conceptual framework**



Source: Own elaboration.

We argue that integration of migrants is conditional on specific migration projects (as described above i.e. observed in terms of migration behaviour, links to the country of origin and country of stay etc.) – in an indirect way, and directly on aspirations and capabilities of immigrants – related not only to certain migration project but also to integration process itself. At the same time, however, we assume that possible changes in the domain of aspirations/capabilities can alter the migration projects as well.

We follow the approach as proposed by several authors (Carling & Collins, 2018; Carling & Schewel, 2018; Czaika & Vothknecht, 2014; de Haas, 2010a) but argue that aspirations and capabilities can be useful not only in understanding certain migratory behaviour (including immobility) but are also instrumental in explaining and interpreting integration outcomes. Our approach is not the first attempt to incorporate the aspirations and capabilities framework into the studies of integration. Lutz (2017) also proposes to conceptualise immigrant integration outcomes as a function of capabilities and aspirations, but his approach is narrower as he is interested in effectiveness of policy interventions. First, he limits his considerations to integration policy outcomes, second, to *integration capabilities* and *integration aspirations*, which he treats as “subsets of more general capabilities and aspirations in life” (p. 8). He refers to both concepts in his model that differentiates between assimilation and multiculturalism as two main policy approaches and claims that the first approach is more incentive-based (designed to increase immigrants’ aspirations) while the latter predominantly opportunity-based

(meant to increase immigrants' capabilities). We find this approach controversial as is the division between assimilation and multiculturalism. Instead, we refer to the notions of aspirations and capabilities that are well established in migration literature and focus on their role in shaping (statistically traceable) migration projects. This allows – as we argue – assessing the integration of various groups of immigrants with diverse plans and strategies. We suggest to include the following variables or proxies<sup>14</sup> of aspirations and capabilities:

- 1) Aspirations: long-term migration plans, household's point of orientation (in the case of temporary or circular migration), marital status, household's structure, presence of children and their place of residence, entrepreneurial plans, desire to naturalise, the importance of bringing family members to the country of stay etc.
- 2) Capabilities: legal status, naturalisation options, human capital including formal education and on-the-job training, language skills, school attainment in the country of stay, household status but also several variables related to the social capital (size and structure of the network) etc.

As noted above, we argue that particular integration outcomes (in various domains, depending on the approach used) should be interpreted not solely in the context of a particular institutional context or integration policies in place but rather conditional on 1) individuals' migration projects and 2) aspirations and capabilities that pre-define the propensity to be integrated and the scope and depth of integration. As clearly shown in many recent studies (e.g. Favell, 2019), full integration is not always desirable nor optimal (e.g. entrepreneurial migration, mobility of highly skilled specialists to less developed countries, circular mobility). In the following part of this section, we will briefly discuss the proposed domains of integration, with a clear focus on the structural/economic one.

#### *Economic/structural domain*

Economic/structural domain refers, in short (see also discussion in the first section), to ability and participation of immigrants in the main institutions of the destination country. It is present in all approaches towards immigrants' integration, in some of them being treated as a key one or as a marker of integration as suggested by Ager and Strang (2008). Those institutions include the labour market, public services (education, health care), and the welfare system.

One of the key areas of interest to immigration scholars has historically been the income position of immigrants. This is clearly due to the American school of research on integration (or rather assimilation) arguing that one of the main indicators of immigrants' success should be a so-called catching-up process, i.e. closing the income gap between natives and newcomers. A large number of studies have shown that along with the time spent in a given country, there is the tendency for catching-up (Chiswick, 1978) and despite some differences, this tendency applies to persons of both sexes and representing various ethnic backgrounds (Chiswick, 1980).

These analyses have evolved and became more complex as additional factors started to be considered, such as belonging to a particular cohort (Borjas, 2015) or generation (Algan et al., 2010), the effect of the economic situation in the destination country (Dustmann, Glitz, et al., 2010) and characteristics of the human capital of immigrants. The last point is particularly important not only as a classical Mincerian factor that impacts both on choices of jobs and remuneration (Borjas, 2014; Mincer, 1958, 1974; Sjaastad, 1962). It is also commonly discussed in terms of the language skills that are presented

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<sup>14</sup> Please note that in a number of cases, particular variables can be used (and interpreted) as both proxies of aspirations/capabilities and various integration domains (e.g. settlement plans can be interpreted as ambitions or aspirations but also as an indicator of successful integration in economic or social terms; host country language literacy points both to the integration progress and capabilities to achieve higher socio-economic position).

as a key factor influencing the so-called transferability of skills to be responsible for severe underemployment of immigrant workers (Alba & Foner, 2014; Williams, 2007; Williams & Baláž, 2014). Importantly, similar conclusions are drawn from the analyses conducted for European countries. Adsera and Chiswick (2007) stressed that upon arrival the status of immigrants in the labour market is worse than that of native workers even if we control for their human capital levels, but this difference decreases with time, which indicates a strong potential for income convergence. There are two important streams of recent literature on labour market integration of immigrants. The first one includes a large number of studies looking at the performance of post-accession migrants in the EU15 countries, particularly in the UK and Ireland (Arpaia et al., 2016; Bachan & Sheehan, 2011; Barrett & Duffy, 2007; Dustmann, Frattini, et al., 2010; Kaczmarczyk, 2014; Rodriguez-Planas & Farre, 2014). The second discusses economic integration of a particular group of immigrants who are deprived of freedom of mobility and free access to the labour market of well-developed countries, i.e. asylum seekers and refugees (Arendt et al., 2020; Beaman, 2012; Bevelander, 2011; Cheung & Phillimore, 2014; Connor, 2010; Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2018).

Analyses of the income position of immigrants reveal several drawbacks of the original approach. First, the most important drawback in the context of this paper refers to the temporal features of migration projects. As shown by Dustmann (2000), there are clear differences in the catching-up process of immigrants residing in the US and Europe. One of the possible explanations – apart from differences in the structural context and labour market policies – lies in the very nature of European migration and in particular refers to a relatively large share of temporary migrants, as it is in the case of the New Immigrant Destinations. If so, the restricted scope of catching-up can be attributed to a) limited incentives to invest in country-specific human capital, including language (Dustmann, 1999) and/or b) selectivity of the outflow (i.e. return migration) that substantially influences the integration outcomes as presented by official statistics and would demand a dedicated methodological approach (Dustmann, 2003; Dustmann & Görlach, 2015). Our approach points to both effects as we emphasise that integration outcomes are driven by migration projects and sets of aspirations and capabilities.

Second, although the American approach is still strongly focused on the income position of immigrants, it is increasingly clear that the economic integration of migrants is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon/process. This kind of approach is offered, among others, by OECD researchers, who present a wide catalogue of factors to describe the labour market position of immigrants (OECD & European Union, 2018). These include employment and labour market participation, unemployment, risk of labour market exclusion, type of work contract, working conditions, job skills, over-qualification, self-employment and other related to the educational system (educational attainment, language proficiency, access to adult education and training). This catalogue could be further widened to include also e.g. job-related training participation, the transition time from formal education to work, long-term unemployment, discouraged worker status, NEET status, sector of employment (public/private, ISCO classification), household's income, relative poverty, in-work poverty, financial exclusion indicators to better reflect the situation of the scrutinised group.

Analyses presented by OECD (2017) show that such broadly defined economic activity and the professional position of immigrants is significantly worse than that of natives. The key issue is, however, the fact that it would be difficult to attribute the existing gaps to roughly defined cultural differences. Rather, they derive from the characteristics of a given labour market and its institutions, which are largely responsible for the effectiveness of 'integration' of immigrants into the labour market. Additionally, immigrants tend to concentrate in specific sectors of the economy and that translates into their income position and other 'vulnerabilities' (Kahanec et al., 2010). The extensive literature on the post-accession migration shows that even persons with a 'secure' residence status and with free access to the labour market often face serious integration barriers and can find themselves in

a vulnerable position (Kaczmarczyk et al., 2020; Kaczmarczyk & Tyrowicz, 2015; Kahanec et al., 2010; Kahanec & Zimmermann, 2008). Some of those studies pointed to the fact that actual labour market outcomes of immigrants (earnings, employment below skills, vertical mobility) are difficult to explain without reference to migration projects and, in particular, to short-term oriented migration strategies (Janicka & Kaczmarczyk, 2016; Kaczmarczyk & Tyrowicz, 2015).

Labour market participation is usually discussed in a close connection with access to the welfare system. First, it follows from theoretical models that generous welfare systems can create migration incentives for persons with particular characteristics and thus contribute to selectivity of migration (Borjas, 1999; Razin & Wahba, 2015). Second, welfare systems at the destination can create incentives or disincentives in terms of labour market participation and thus hamper integration process (Blauberger & Schmidt, 2014; Brochmann & Hagelund, 2011; De Giorgi & Pellizzari, 2009; Koopmans, 2010). Recent studies show that discussion on the relationship between migration and welfare is extremely complex and immensely stereotyped (Kaczmarczyk & Rapaport, 2014). Aggregate studies do not confirm the welfare magnet hypothesis but analyses on individual data sets accounting for the heterogeneity of migrants show that generous welfare systems may have a negative impact on the selection of migrants and their labour market performance (Jakubiak, 2020) and thus integration. Moreover, overall fiscal effects of migration are strongly conditional not only on individual characteristics of migrants and the structure of the welfare state but also on integration in the labour market that explains a mighty part of difference between immigrants and natives in this respect (Kaczmarczyk, 2013; OECD, 2013).

### *Social domain*

The social domain is one of the key areas of integration analysis, present in all conceptual approaches discussed in the previous section. A useful categorisation has been proposed by Ager and Strang (2008) who highlighted the role of social connections and suggested looking at various forms of social capital as represented by *social bonds*, *social bridges* and *social links*. This approach goes beyond the traditional studies on migrant networks that see social capital as a set of interpersonal ties connecting both mobile and immobile persons thereby creating a kind of migration infrastructure (Guilmoto & Sandron, 2001) that can substantially lower risks of migration and shape its momentum (de Haas, 2010b; Faist, 1997; Fawcett, 1989; D. S. Massey et al., 1993). Integration-related approaches rather point to various types of social capital. *Social bonds* involve links and connections to other co-ethnics and have enormous effects on the selection of destination and early post-arrival performance (Bauer et al., 2002; Kindler et al., 2015; Kindler & Szulecka, 2013). On the other hand, *social bridges* describe relationships between immigrants and the host society (including migrants and minorities of various backgrounds) and, to a large extent, explain the ability to go out of the ethnic niche. There is a large number of studies showing that both bonding and bridging social capital has an enormous impact on the economic integration of immigrants. First, as suggested above, access to migrant networks and linkages to other co-ethnics secures access to information (on available jobs, accommodation etc.) but also facilitates the employment in the ethnic economy (Calvó-Armengol & Jackson, 2004; Kindler & Szulecka, 2013; Sanderson, 2014). Second, differences in access to the bridging social capital can explain the sorting out of migrants in the labour market and thus contribute to the heterogeneity in the progress of integration, particularly an ability to work on the open labour market, and impact on the income differentials between migrants (with a key role of persons employed exclusively in migrant niches) (Franzen & Hangartner, 2006; Kanas et al., 2009; Lancee, 2010; Sanderson, 2014). Overall, existing empirical evidence shows that while in the short term, access to the network significantly increases the chance of integration into the labour market (and positively impacts on wage levels), in

the long term, staying within the ethnic network can limit the possibility of full or successful integration into the host economy (Danzer & Ulku, 2011; Danzer & Yaman, 2013; DiMaggio & Garip, 2012). Last but not least, these effects can be additionally strengthened by the *social links*, i.e. connections between immigrants and the structures/institutions of the host society (Ager & Strang, 2008).

### *Identificational/cultural/civic and political domain*

The last part of the proposed model refers to several domains (including identificational, cultural, and political ones) that are subject of scrutiny particularly in countries with a relatively long history of migration and well-established migrant communities, including sizeable second and third generations of immigrants (Alba, 2005; Crul et al., 2012; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Thomson & Crul, 2007). Due to a clear focus on this kind of societies in the migration literature, there is a large number of studies looking at both determinants and progress of integration in these domains (Bijl & Verweij, 2012; Fokkema & de Haas, 2015; Garcés-Mascareñas & Penninx, 2016a; Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016; e.g. Scholten et al., 2015) but their analysis is beyond the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, we note, first, that there is a clear connection between identificational/cultural/civic and political domain (especially with reference to dominant language acquisition, e.g. Chiswick & Miller, 1995, 2015; Ersanilli & Koopmans, 2010; Föbker & Imani, 2017) and other spheres of integration. Second, we argue that relatively slow progress in terms of identificational or political integration does not necessarily is an outcome of unfriendly policies or structural contexts but can be also attributed to particular migration projects (e.g. circular or temporary migration) or aspirations/capabilities (e.g. low interest in the settlement or even long-term stay in a given country).

### **Concluding remarks**

Even if commonly quoted (and frequently used) the term ‘integration’ remains highly controversial in recent scientific debate. There is an on-going discussion on the very ‘essence’ of the concept, its normative connotations or appropriate level of analysis. We argued that it generally does not describe well the situation of non-orthodox categories of immigrants, including temporary migrants or entrepreneurs, with complex migration plans and integration paths. This is one of the reasons why studies on integration are particularly challenging in the case of the New Immigrant Destinations. To overcome the difficulties identified in the literature, we propose a new conceptual model and frame it in a flexible way to address varieties of migratory behaviour. Our model assumes that the assessment of integration outcomes should be conditional on, first, migration projects/migratory careers of an individual and, second, on immigrant’s aspirations and capabilities to become included in the institutions and relations of the host society (to refer directly to Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006). Importantly, we argue that what matters is not only the set of aspirations and capabilities to be mobile but also aspirations and capabilities to enter a particular integration path.

The proposed model focuses on the economic integration of immigrants. Nonetheless, it includes key domains of integration and it is flexible enough to include also other ones discussed in the literature (e.g. the spatial segregation). Similarly, the suggested catalogue of variables or proxies of economic and social integration should be treated as an open and inclusive one. There are still some challenges that need to be addressed on a practical level. In particular, in the case of economic integration, there is a commonly debated issue of the reference category. On the one hand, some scholars would treat immigrants as well (economically) integrated if they can hold a similar labour position to natives

(Barrett & Duffy, 2007) or if they are able to reduce initial gaps (in terms of wages, sectors of employment, working conditions etc., Dustmann & Frattini, 2014). On the other hand, one could argue that it is enough to function well in the labour market and be economically independent. We perceive the latter approach as more flexible and thus more inclusive. The first one would demand to apply not only absolute but also relative perspective and to choose relevant reference category (and to control for possible selection bias). In both cases, however, our conceptual model would provide new (and useful) insights into the understanding of the process of immigrant integration.

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